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ABSTRACT

A Career Orientation Program (COP) which provides exploratory work experience as well as classroom career instruction is described. The program is part of the High School in the Community (HSC), New Haven, Connecticut, an alternative school designed to provide a choice of learning environments within the public school system. Four components comprise the program. Experience Based Career Education provides opportunities for the student to systematically sample conditions of work in a variety of fields for class credit. General Work Experience allows part-time employment as part of the total school program. Vocational Work Experience provides specific occupational preparation for entry into selected careers. Other experience programs exist for sampling a variety of non-academic experiences such as arts, crafts, and music. After the student has been screened and officially enrolled in the program, the COP coordinator arranges meetings with the prospective employer and outlines responsibilities of the student, the community teacher, and the coordinator. Official outside evaluations note the innovative nature of the program, the large number of student participants, and the willingness of employers to cooperate. Major limitations are the half-time position of the coordinator, the suffering economy, and the lack of publicity for the program. A brief history of the COP from 1971 to the present concludes the document. (KC)

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CAREER ORIENTATION PROGRAM

by Geoffrey Smith

SP 011 953

CAREER ORIENTATION PROGRAM

The Career Orientation Program is one of the most innovative aspects of the High School in the Community. This program provides for exploratory work experience as well as classroom career instruction. The combination of these two facets enable the COP to enhance the overall philosophy and objectives of the school. On another level, the COP provides students and staff with specialized services previously unavailable to the school and provides flexible means for parents, business people, and student volunteers, i.e., the community, to be involved directly in education.

Philosophy and Objectives

The High School in the Community feels that equipping students with work related skills and decision making experiences will better enable them to succeed upon graduation. The COP is organized to show people what types of skills they might need, to give people a chance to test out those skills, and to decide on career alternatives.

The overall objective is to have students learn, experience, and decide for themselves which skills will work best in the context of their own lives. If this process is tried more than once (quite possible and highly suggested in a 3 or 4 year school situation), a student has a much better chance of determining effectively his/her life's goals.

Primary emphasis of the COP is towards juniors and seniors, and for the most part students who are not college bound, but these suggested guidelines are not restrictive. Students at all levels, and with all kinds of career aspirations, benefit from the COP. Also important to note is that the program can be structured to aid particular groups, such as the handicapped, not only the general high school student served at HSC.

Types of Community Based Educational Programs

1. Experience Based Career Education - primarily a career guidance program.
   This provides opportunities for the student to systematically sample conditions of work in a variety of occupational fields. Usually a student expresses an interest in a particular vocation and the school finds a suitable placement. This provides a basis, through observation and supervised participation, for an informed career choice. The student receives school credit for successful participation, but no monetary remuneration for the work.

2. General Work Experience - designed to develop desirable attitudes and promote understanding of the relationships between formal education job success through supervised, part-time employment as part of the total school program.
   This part-time work need not be related to the specific occupational goals of the student. Sometimes the student already has a part-time job and wants to earn high school credit for the work; sometimes the school can give the student a job through the Federal Work Study Program. Also, Co-operative Work Experience and Distributive Ed are two state funded programs which allow students to participate in this kind of work experience while going to school. The student is paid by the employer, who in turn may be reimbursed by local, state, or federal funds, and the student also receives school credit if he/she participates in career classes at school.

3. Vocational Work Experience - specific occupational preparation for entry into selected careers.
   Employment for a student in this category is normally within the occupational area into which he or she desires employment following graduation. A student not enrolled in a related vocational program may enroll for vocational work experience only if it is a matter of record that his/her occupational goal is that for which on-the-job training is being received or requested. Vocational courses at the larger high schools or other educational institutions are included in this type of work experience. Students receive school credit, usually based on the number of hours of participation in the program. They are encouraged to take career education classes at the school.

4. Other experience programs - primarily for sampling a wide variety of non-academic experiences.
   This category draws on a wider, and more diversified, community body to offer courses in art, crafts, music, and other general experience fields. Some academic experiences which are not available within the limits of the school building or school staff may be included under this category. The student receives school credit for successful participation.

Organization

COP has an organizational structure within HSC and is also included with the Career Plan for the other city high schools. The program is carried out by the COP Co-ordinator with advice, leads, and suggestions coming from the staff and the students. Day-to-day decisions are made and carried out by the co-ordinator; major decisions on program orientation, philosophy, and emphasis have all-staff approval.

The COP Co-ordinator is a ½-time teacher, ½-time co-ordinator elected to this position by the staff. During the 1975-76 school year, with money from a special grant, one other teacher volunteered to aid in proposal writing and the co-teaching of career classes. Qualifications for this post include an interest in guidance work, administrative duties, public relations, and selling. It is not necessary for someone to hold a degree in counseling to begin or maintain this job. However, the expansion of this program into a more comprehensive vocational counseling department could demand an advanced degree and/or certification.

Recruitment of Community Placements

The general procedure for approaching a business is with an interest-catching letter or brochure, thereafter followed by a phone call. Phone calls save footwork and embarrassment if an employer says no or doesn't want to be put on the spot. When an employer does seem interested, then the next step is to set up a time to meet and talk. The rest is selling the employer.

It may seem that large businesses would be more easily persuaded to participate, but experience has shown that they are not. Small businesses, small handcraft shops, and neighborhood stores are the most co-operative.

The best aids and support agencies are the local State Department of

Vocational Education and Co-operative Work Exparience programs. The Chamber of Commerce can help with business contacts in any city. Other aids are friends, neighbors, and relatives - anyone who can provide useful leads in the area.

Student Enrollment and Placement

At the beginning of each year and at registration times before each quarter, the COP Co-ordinator circulates among all the classes and gives an introduction to the Career Orientation Program. Students are advised at that point to read through the COP Course Catalogue, and to talk with their guidance teachers and the COP Co-ordinator about course offerings or their own ideas.

The official enrollment follows these steps after a student has indicated his/her interest:

1. Student fills out a written application to the COP.
2. COP Co-ordinator holds a screening interview with the student. This includes a discussion of COP goals, student goals, student attendance and responsibilities, and a detailed look as the process of securing a COP placement.
3. Student is introduced to employer and placed in area of interest.

The placement procedure consists of the COP Co-ordinator contacting the appropriate business for possible placement. Because of the duration of the COP at HSC, we have built up a considerable number of contacts in the greater New Haven area, but this can be quite difficult in some cases. Once the placement is identified then these steps are followed:

1. The community teacher is informed about student interest in placement.
2. Needs, goals, working assignment, and time schedules are worked out.
3. The student is brought in to meet with the community teacher, and the placement is completed.

Once in a while employers request that 2 or 3 students be sent to them so that they can make their own decision, but generally employers are satisfied with the screening process of the school.

As an aid to the enrollment and placement procedure, we have worked out the following statement of the responsibilities of each party involved:

1. Responsibilities of the Student

   a) to be regular in attendance in school and in the placement

   b) to be on time for the placement

   c) to notify the school and employer of impending or actual absences

   d) to conduct him/herself in a satisfactory manner

   e) to not drop the placement without first notifying the school and giving an explanation

   f) to discuss all problems as soon as they arise with the COP Co-ordinator and/or the employer

   The student also agrees that if these responsibilities are not fulfilled, then he/she may be withdrawn from the program by the employer or by the COP Co-ordinator.

2. Responsibilities of the Community Teacher

   a) to act within legal labor requirements

   b) to observe and report on the conduct, attitudes, and working ability of the student

   c) to not abuse the goals of the student by unfair or unnecessary work assignments

   d) to notify the COP Co-ordinator in case of any problems

   e) to keep track of the student's time and work records and to write evaluative reports at the end of the student's placement

3. Responsibilities of the COP Co-ordinator

   a) to co-ordinate student work experience with the school Guidance Counselor

   b) to interview and screen student applicants about COP goals

   c) to inform students of areas of available work experience

   d) to observe and support students in their various placements

Funding

Funding for the COP, seperate from the school as a whole, has generally been non-existent. During the 1975-76 school year, funding for classroom career instruction came through PL 89-10, Title II, ESEA Small Reading Grant. The grant award of enabled the purchase of books, filmstrips, subscriptions, and other career instruction related services for the school. Salary costs (which can be funded seperately) have been paid either by Special Project funds or as a regular teaching salary. Although at HSC the COP has been able to operate from the general working budget, other sources of funding worth exploring are: Vocational Education Act of 1963 as amended 1968; Vocational Education Act for Handicapped and Disadvantaged; Neighborhood Youth Corps; Sheltered Workshops; and Title VII ESEA grants.

Evaluation

For the first five years of its existence, COP was evaluated by official outside evaluaters. Results have been impressive. Evaluators note the innovative nature of the program, that over half of the student population in any one year makes use of and desires to repeat in the COP, that employers have been continually willing to participate. On the management level, evaluators have noted that the program has been successfully maintained and expanded by a single part-time co-ordinator.

Limitations

COP's limitations are few but pointed. For the benefit of reaching enough non-college bound students and providing adequate courses and counseling, a full-time co-ordinator would be more successful than the present ½-time position. Another limitation is the conflict with other programs. Larger high schools in the area also have Distributive Ed, Handicapped Programs, special Vocational Programs, all of which ask employers for consideration

in jobs. Although most COP work placements are not paid, and therefore the least expensive to the employer, the competition is stiff. Some programs, e.g., the Retarded Childrens Association, can now pay the employer for training work with a student.

A problem beyond our control is the economy. Employers who are feeling financial squeezes and making personnel cutbacks cannot afford the time and energy to work with students.

One of the areas in which HSC has been weak is in actively publicizing its COP. Publicity could be garnered through radio programs, civic functions, parades, and other media. However, the amount of time needed for preparing good publicity material with a half-time co-ordinator has left this area neglected.

History

The COP began in 1971, but was originally called the Community Orientation Program. It's birth was mainly from the ideas and efforts of one member of the staff, although others have since been involved in the program in many ways. The first year was decreed a failure by the evaluators. At that point only about 20 businesses participated in the program.

The second year a concerted effort was made at firming up the program. Goals were established, and many businesses were approached about their involvement. The interest and volume of participation in COP swelled.

During its third year, the COP Co-ordinator started seminar groups for students before they were given certain placements, to help them achieve more success. Although the seminar groups did not do well that year, the number of COP applications and placements continued to rise. However, many students abused the goals of COP that year, and toward the end of the year a staff COP Committee was set up to re-direct the purposes and goals of the

program. The suggestions of this committee were to (1) screen students more carefully, since it would be better to have a high quality program for 50 students than a shaky program for 100, and (2) look for more offerings from tutors as well as the exploratory work experience.

Since its fourth year, the program has operated on a much stronger basis. During the worst of the recession in 1975 and 1976 many employers had to drop out of the program, but new trade areas were found. A model careers class was tried that has worked fairly well. Another idea recently added is to have a COP Placement Group, i.e., a class which meets every day to act as a support group to those students participating in the COP.

Besides increasing the number and type of in-school career classes, the program is rapidly becoming a comprehensive training and support service for the school. Consideration is being given to the establishment of a personal career file for each HSC student. These files include a career interest sheet and academic records, and would be used to help students and the COP Co-ordinator make decisions about COP participation and possibilities. Also, tutoring services and paid work experiences that build toward a career are being expanded. New areas of funding, new areas of training, and new ways to approach and support more non-college bound students are being explored.